1607/4360

THE *DISSENTER's GUIDE*

IN CHOOSING A PASTOR:

POINTING OUT

The neceſſary qualifications of a Goſpel Miniſter, and how to be able to diſtinguiſh thoſe that are poſſeſſed of them:

IN A LETTER TO THE SECEDERS.

Deſigned to promote the power of Godlineſs; and exceedingly neceſſary to all of every denomination, that have a vote in the Calling of a Miniſter.

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THE

AUTHOR'S APOLOGY.

THE deſign of this letter was, to uſe the means for remedying ſome great evils. I ſaw that unleſs ſomething could be ſaid that would cut deep and wound ſore, there was no probability of ſucceſs. I believe I may have rather exceeded in ſeverity: but let it be remembered, that *faithful are the wounds of a friend.* I have now expunged ſome ſentences; and ſoftened a number of expreſſions, where there was too much aſperity in the ſtyle.

Be aſſured, that no perſonal offence of any kind gave riſe to this letter or any part of it. A zeal, (ſincere, I hope, though poſſibly miſtaken,) for the intereſts of real religion, and only this, as far as I know my own heart, led me to this addreſs. The ſtyle of it is ſuch as I myſelf do not reliſh; and which, were I to take the pen again, I probably would not imitate: but the aſperity of it ſeems to be in ſome degree juſtified by the occaſion.

THE

DISSENTER'S GUIDE

IN

CHOOSING A PASTOR.

HONOURED CHRISTIANS,

THE ſtation you have taken reflects no ſmall honour on your heads and hearts. While the greater part of your countrymen are acting the part of neutrals, you have made a ſtand for eccleſiaſtical liberty, the purity of the goſpel, and the power of religion; and that in a vigorous and public manner. I cannot but congratulate you on the great honour that Providence has conferred upon you, in leading you to act ſuch a diſtinguiſhed part. Were this a matter that coſt you nothing, leſs were to be ſaid: but while, at a conſiderable expence, though in ſome places few in number, you ſupport a diſſenting miniſtry, we muſt rank you with the generous aſſerters of liberty, and the beſt friends of your country.—What remains now, but that you ſtudy to make a proper uſe of the privileges connected with your preſent ſituation? That not reſting in the form, you ſtudy the power of godlineſs: that growing in knowledge, you receive with a lively faith the doctrines of the goſpel, imbibe the ſpirit thereof, and ſhew forth, in a holy, wiſe, benevolent, and uſeful practice, the various Chriſtian graces. Particularly, that as you have acquired the liberty (as you always had the

right) to chooſe your own Paſtors, you ſhould make the beſt uſe poſſible of ſo valuable a privilege.

To aſſiſt you to do this, I ſhall give you the beſt advice I can. On this the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles has ſet us an example, in his firſt epiſtle to Timothy, chap. iii. and in that to Titus, chap. i. Nor were theſe advices only meant to direct Timothy and Titus, but alſo to aſſiſt and direct the people, as other advices were. 1 Tim. iv. 6. General advices on this head do no more hinder the people's free choice, than printed explanations of the laws hinder the free determination of a jury, which in our land is the bulwark of civil liberty. And it is no objection againſt the people's right, that they need inſtruction to qualify them for making a proper uſe of it. Is it any argument againſt the uſe of the ſacraments, that people need inſtruction to prepare them for a worthy receiving of them? Neither is it any argument againſt the people's right to chooſe their paſtors, that they alſo need inſtruction to prepare them for that work. And, indeed, there are many things neceſſary to be known here, that can ſcarcely be thought to occur to the common people, without ſuch inſtruction; but which, if they once underſtood them, they would moſt conſcientiouſly attend to.

Conſider then, dear Chriſtians, the very great importance of your making a proper choice; and thereby obtaining a full, a wiſe, a holy, and faithful declaration of divine truths, and a pure diſpenſation of religious ordinances among you. This muſt ordinarily be the principal mean of the inſtruction, ſanctification, comfort, and ſalvation of yourſelves and others; and conſequently the mean of ſetting up the

kingdom of Chriſt, and of promoting the declarative glory of God in your bounds.* To obtain this was the great end of the Seceſſion: in this point, therefore, all the great ends of the teſtimonies, wreſtlings, labour, pains, and expence of all Seceders are immediately concentred. Should you, therefore, through your own inattention and neglect, get an ignorant, lazy, imprudent, unſkilful, or unfaithful Paſtor, you in a great meaſure loſe the end of all you have done: yet it can ſcarce be doubted, but ſome ſuch may be found among them that are educated in what are called Orthodox Principles.

Conſider, my friends, that the Seceſſion church is now of more than fifty years ſtanding: that the making a profeſſion therein is not generally attended with the ſame difficulties now, as at the beginning. As men's ſincerity is now leſs tried than formerly, ſo it is proportionably more doubtful. And it is ſometimes the caſe, that they who have their religion by generation, have it not by regeneration. But in the beſt ſtate of the church, a profeſſion of religion is no abſolute proof of real religion: hence, there will be great need of caution in calling miniſters, whatever be the ſtate of the church Again,

Though the livings (*ſtipends*) in moſt places of the Seceſſion can be no object or motive to a man of parts; yet it can ſcarce be doubted, but, ſmall as they are, they may be an object to ſome ſordid minds,

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* Let it ever be kept in view, that, through the whole of this letter, a goſpel-miniſtry is only conſidered as a mean of ſalvation: The ſucceſs of the Word read and preached depends wholly on the ſovereign mercy of God, and the grace of the holy Spirit, Iſa. liii. 1. 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. and not properly on miniſters.

whoſe parts entitle them to no better, and who, thro' want of friends or intereſt, have no chance for a preſentation in the national church. But where this is the chief inducement to enter into the miniſtry, little good is to be expected from the miniſter: and the ſame may be ſaid of all other ſecular motives, ſuch as honour, eaſe, &c.

It is to be lamented, that in all churches, men are too often led to the miniſtry more by the choice of their patents, than by their own perſonal choice: to this I ſhall not only apply the vulgar proverb, *That man may make a preacher, but God only can make a miniſter;* but rather ſay, that it is a moſt dangerous thing to make a choice of the miniſterial office for a child, as one would chooſe any other art, trade, or profeſſion for him. If a man chooſes to give his ſon a liberal education, he ſhould wait until his child have finiſhed his courſe at the univerſity, (which ſhould not be at too early a period) before he form any judgment on this head. If the youth then, at eighteen, nineteen, or twenty years of age, give ſtrong indications of piety and ſobriety, of a love to the miniſtry, and of promiſing abilities, he ſhould be allowed to attend the divinity-hall, and proſecute his ſtudies: but if otherwiſe, he ſhould, for his own ſake, and for the ſake of the church, by all means be diſcouraged from it, and be cauſed to apply to ſome other buſineſs.

From theſe conſiderations, it may be evident, what great need there is for attention, care, and the utmoſt caution in making choice of a miniſter, even from among orthodox and well educated young men.

But I know you will ſay, that Preſbyteries are to blame, if they licenſe unworthy or improper perſons. Why, indeed, I believe, they do not ſo to their knowledge: yea, ſo far to the contrary, that perhaps there never was any church, ſince the reformation, more cautious on this head than the Seceſſion church; they are almoſt unequalled in this point: how long this will continue I cannot ſay. But you are to obſerve, that if young men go through their trial diſcourſes, and be free from immoralities, it will not be eaſy work to keep them back. No Preſbytery can do this, without aſſigning a valid reaſon: and where ſome miniſters may have ſcruples, they may not be able to adduce ſolid proofs. If a young man reckon himſelf aggrieved, he can appeal to a ſuperior court. And every young man has his friends among the clergy, who, from connection or ſome human motive, may be ready to favour him, and to try to get him forward. If the clergy were to do all, there would be no uſe for a popular call among you, more than in the eſtabliſhed church, in which it has long been reckoned unneceſſary, from an entire confidence in the exceſſive care and faithfulneſs of their Preſbyteries. But let me tell you, that your liberty to judge of the character and qualifications of preachers, gives you more power than all Preſbyteries put together: for you can refuſe as many as you pleaſe, without giving any reaſon for your refuſal; and this a Preſbytery cannot do. Your election or non-election then, is the only ſureſt, ſafeſt, and eaſieſt trial, if you uſe your power aright. What a ſacred, what a noble and invaluable privilege is this! And how worthy

to be contended for, though it ſhould coſt us more than it now does! What a pitiable caſe are theſe people in, who have ſpiritual guides, no ways qualified for directing them in the way to life, forced upon them; while their conſent or diſſent is no more regarded, than if they had no intereſt or concern in the matter! But, alas! many of theſe people are regardleſs of their ſouls; ſo they care not much what ſort their miniſters be, or whether they have miniſters at all, or not.

As to you who have ſeen the value of the people's right to chooſe their Paſtors, you are ſtill in danger of loſing the benefit that ſhould ariſe from this right, by your own ignorance, unſingleneſs, or inattention.

Perhaps you do not conſider, that a goſpel miniſter ought to be a perſon of univerſal knowledge: without this, he will not be ſo well qualified to explain the ſcriptures, or to apply them. He may indeed make a ſhift to go over ſome general doctrines, like a ſchool-boy repeating his leſſons; but he will never ſatisfyingly explain one doctrine, much leſs will he, to any good purpoſe, apply it. Eſpecially, he will never to purpoſe explain to you your duty; for to do this well, requires a knowledge almoſt as extenſive and various as the works of God, and as the powers, principles, paſſions, relations divine and human, intereſts and occupations, works and ways of men. I do not mean to preach: though, if I did in ſuch a noble cauſe, it were a pardonable fault. The nature and ſource of obligation to God; and of conſequence, the nature of that love and ſervice we owe unto him—the vaſt extent of it—the means and the

diſtinguiſhing marks of it; the many branches of Chriſtian duty we owe to man in a world; the graces or Chriſtian virtues we are called to exerciſe—the nature and extent—reaſons and ends of them—all theſe muſt be plainly unfolded: and with theſe, the power, deceit, and unnumbered branches of ſin. What an extent of knowledge is neceſſary to do this to any purpoſe! And unleſs it be done, a public miniſtry is vain. Since miraculous gifts are ceaſed, muſt we not ſuppoſe, that a man muſt have thought and ſtudied for many years, and attended his ſtudies with the ſerious exerciſe of religion, before he can do this? And can it require any leſs to ſcan the attributes of God—the myſteries of his grace and providence—the glorious plan of redemption—and the adorable depths of the divine love—or the nature and manner of the divine operations on the heart to recover an apoſtate creature? Yet theſe are not the heads of things! And remember, every good preacher muſt be an univerſal preacher; he muſt be capable to illuſtrate the various branches of divine truth; otherwiſe, he will not much profit his people. A man that has only a few ſubjects he can ſpeak upon, may do very well for a paſſingviſit, but he will never do for a fixed paſtor. God does nothing in vain; what he has been pleaſed to reveal, man muſt not dare to conceal; to allude to what is vulgarly ſaid, *Not an hoof or an hair muſt be parted with*, and we muſt neither through lazineſs nor timorouſneſs, *ſhun to declare all the counſel of God.* Acts xx. 27.

Such a preacher, then, muſt not only preach juſtification, but alſo ſanctification; not only faith,

but alſo repentance; not only ſpiritual exerciſe, but alſo the duties that we owe in common life; not only a teſtimony and a religious profeſſion, but alſo the emptineſs of a profeſſion, and the need of regeneration. Nor muſt he ſpeak only of the matter of theſe things, but alſo of the grounds and reaſons of them, the means of them, and their neceſſary ends. In a word, he muſt deſcant at large on God's nature and attributes; on man's ſtate, ſins, and duties; on providence and redemption, time and eternity, heaven and hell.

Now, as I ſaid before, ſince inſpiration ceaſed, the knowledge of theſe is only to be acquired by ſtudy: and ſtudy requires capacity, diligence, and perſeverance. In many things it requires the aid of much obſervation, both of the ways of God and the diſpoſitions of men; and in all, the aid of ſerioufneſs and religious experience, of God's grace and bleſſing. But though much time is uſually ſpent at ſchool and college, do all ſtudents occupy their time in this manner; or are all diligent after they commence preachers? Were this the caſe, I think we would ſee more ſigns of it than we do. Let this however be a rule with you, never to chooſe one for your Paſtor, unleſs he in ſome meaſure come up to the above character. Let him be a perſon of extenſive knowledge, and that appears to be given to thought and ſtudy.*

* Perhaps this article is a little too ſevere. Sometimes eminent piety makes up for the defect of knowledge. 1 Cor. i. 26—31. And there are differences of places.

You have one advantage for knowing the abilities of your preachers, that the eſtabliſhment have not. Among them there are many lazy fellows who never ſtudied, and therefore cannot preach, but muſt copy their ſermons from authors, and read them off their papers; this any blackſmith, taylor, or ſhoemaker that can read and write might do. This may be called the levelling ſcheme; by it, an empty aſs may come out with one of the firſt-rate ſermons of the age. There can be little diſtinction of abilities there. But why do I call them aſſes? We have heard of an aſs that once a day delivered a preaching without a paper. That aſs however got its mouth opened; a favour, it ſeems, denied to them. But your preachers do all to a man deliver their diſcourſes from their memory or judgment, or both, without a paper before them. Yet even here you may be deceived; and the more confident you are, you run the greater riſk. It is a certain fact, though perhaps you do not think of it, that a man that ſays his preaching without a book, may ſteal his ſermon as well as the other, though it will coſt him much more labour. We have heard of a young man's courting of a wife in borrowed clothes; ſo it ſometimes happens with preachers who *court* a call. The only thing you can learn in that caſe, is whether the preacher has a good voice and memory, and whether he can ſet off his diſcourſe with a decent air or not. What then ſhall be done here? Why really, this is more eaſily aſked than anſwered. And there is ſo much precipitancy, preſumption, and ſelf-confidence in many profeſſors, that it is almoſt vain to adviſe them on the point,

till they find out their miſtake themſelves, as they generally will, after ſome years trial, and then it is too late to mend. If I might venture to ſay any thing on the ſubject, I would firſt ſhew you the danger of the above-mentioned practice, in a candidate for a call. I do not mean here to argue the point, if *borrowing*, or what is called *ſtealing* of ſermons, be unlawful in any caſe---Perhaps there are many worſe things done. And as moſt of our reading preachers in the church are thought to be thieves, I wiſh they would ſteal good ſermons, and not murder them in the reading. A good ſermon is ſtill good as to the matter, though ſtolen; and it might ſometimes be of more uſe than a bad one of their own making. As to the fancied reputation which men in all churches acquire with the vulgar by ſtealing ſermons, let them enjoy the pleaſure of it, and let them pique themſelves on their borrowed plumes: an aſs will ſtill be an aſs, though in a lion's ſkin; and a blockhead will ſtill be a blockhead, though he affect to be thought a man of genius. They cannot ſteal always, and their own nonſenſe will come out ſometimes; this, or ſomething elſe in their way will always diſcover them to men of real ſenſe. Were men humble, wiſe, and honeſt, they would rather ſtudy authors than copy them. Books were written to be read and ſtudied; and to a divine, ſtudy is abſolutely neceſſary. No man is born with a head full of divinity; yea, few are endued with an original genius, ſo as to be fit to think for themſelves: hence all muſt learn; and the greater part in every ſociety muſt acquire ſentiments chiefly from authors. The caſe of candi-

dates for a call is peculiar; they are giving the people a trial of their abilities. True, they are preaching the goſpel for men's ſalvation; but the other is alſo in the caſe: now it is rather unfair in theſe to ſhine in borrowed feathers. If they have abilities, it ſhews lazineſs and a falſe ambition: and if they have not, it is impoſing upon the people. Perhaps theſe may think, that by continuing to borrow they will ſtill maintain a character, after they are ſettled. But this will ſeldom be the caſe. Once that a clergyman is ſettled in the ſeceding way, he has got ſo much work to do beſide, that it will not be poſſible to get the time neceſſary for furniſhing diſcourſes by borrowing; unleſs he have an unnatural memory or an iron conſtitution, it will kill him. The reaſon is, it is ordinarily much harder to get another man's ſermon by heart, than (to a man of ordinary capacity) to make and get by heart one of his own. But if men be once warm in their ſeats, I doubt if they will have ſo much honour or conſcience as put themſelves to too much trouble; at the beſt, their ſtock muſt be ſtill wearing out; and there will often be a woful difference between ther private ſentiments, which are their own, and their public diſcourſes which are not their own.

Having pointed out the danger of this practice in a candidate for a call; I would now ſhew you how you may avoid the impoſition ariſing from it. This is ſeldom to be done by your acquaintance with authors. Moſt of the common people have not much time to read: the authors that theſe preachers make uſe of are uncommon, and ſuch as you have

not in your hands: and when a ſermon is taken from a known author, his diſcourſe is ſo gutted, garbled, and tranſpoſed, that you cannot know it. If you truſt to this, you may ſometimes blame an innocent man. Men of deep thought do ſometimes ſo enter into the ſpirit of a *noble* author, that they will retain the ſentiments half a ſcore of years after they have read the book, and when they have not ſeen it for a long time. But the beſt way to prevent this impoſition, in my opinion, is, that you make it an abſolute rule never to call any man for a few days hearing: let this rule never on any account be departed from. If you want more hearings, you may often have this by petitioning a ſuperior court: and your aſking a hearing, as it is only aſking a trial, does not in any caſe bind you to call that man. Perhaps you will fear that you may miſs ſome *great preacher!* But you will hear by and by, that *popular preachers* are not always the *beſt* miniſters: and as, by precipitancy here you run a dreadful riſk; ſo, by caution, you will ſeldom, if ever, loſe any thing. The beſt preachers are not always *very popular*, and never, but when they have ſome of theſe trifling accompliſhments that are no way eſſential to *good ſenſe* or *real religion.**

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* To ſuch as are acquainted with the writer, this and ſome other articles of a ſimilar import, will not appear to have proceeded from ſpleen. He knows by expetience what the powers of the tongue *can*, and what they *cannot* do. The carrying on religion is a work of grace: and though it admits all the powers of *real eloquence*, yet that eloquence muſt be ſpiritual, it muſt be heavenly, it muſt be ſerious and ſolemn. 1 Cor. ii. 4.---8. 13. John vii. 46.

Upon hearing your preacher you ought to obſerve whether he appear able on all ſubjects; on the doctrines of faith and morals—on internal grace and outward means; or whether he ſeems in the main to have but one tale. If he eſſay different ſubjects, be ſure you obſerve whether he caſts great light on them, and whteher he applies them well, either as he goes along, or when he is done. All this you may do without ſitting as rigid critics, (an office that few of you are fit for) and without marring your ſouls edification. And from this you may learn ſomething in moſt caſes.

Again, let a few of the moſt judicious and prudent of your people get acquainted with your preacher, and if he be a worthy man he will be ready to converſe with them on religious ſubjects. He cannot *always* pretend want of time; preachers, having only one work to do, have a deal more time than ſettled miniſters. If he be ſtudious, the converſe of a diſcreet ſenſible profeſſor will be a relaxation to him, unleſs he be one of theſe triflers whoſe turn makes them diſlike ſerious or rational converſe; and who fly to what you call *viſiting* and *polite company*. If he wiſh to take a walk or go out to ſee the country, (which is an innocent, I might have ſaid an excellent recreation to a ſtudious man, giving health to the body, and vigour to the mind and ſpirits), in that caſe, ſome one of theſe knowing and diſcreet profeſſors may ſet a time with him and accompany him. Now, by repeated converſe you may find him out. And if he be ſhy of converſe with perſons that can ſpeak ſenſe to him, he is either a blockhead or a hy-

pocrite. But take care that this be attempted only by the moſt prudent, ſerious, and ſenſible; and there are but few very ſenſible in moſt congregations. You will ſee in the Letters on the people's right, (page 64, at the foot) that though all have an equal vote in chooſing a paſtor, yet the opinion of ſome ought to have more weight than that of others, in determining us how to vote. Do not however give up your minds implicitly to others; for ſenſible men may be ſometimes biaſſed by wrong motives, or they may be under influence. In this caſe they are very dangerous: then eloquence and activity may divide or break a congregation. But you will, by attention find out this, (I mean whether they be under influence) for honeſty will generally ſpeak for itſelf.

Once more; be ſure, where you have a choice, to pitch upon the moſt knowing, prudent, and pious family in your congregation to lodge your miniſter with. From them you may learn ſomething: if they be empty, weak, or ſilly, they will always fix on the preacher that flatters their humour moſt, and will often miſtake: but if they be prudent and honeſt they will be a guide to you. By theſe you muſt learn, whether your preacher be a ſtudious man; whether he be a ſenſible, ſerious, and devout man; what is his turn, humour, and behaviour; and how he occupies his time. Againſt the teſtimony of that family, if they be ſingle, prudent, and pious, you can ſcarcely venture on a call: for *great preachers* may ſometimes be *bad men.* There is no danger here from a prudent family: they know it to be a breach of ſcripture and good manners to mention even the real

faults of any man, without abſolute neceſſity, Tit. iii. 2. Prov. x. 12. and xvii. 9; and much more the private faults of one that lodges in their houſe. And they know that there can never be any neceſſity here, unleſs their people were diſpoſed to call that man. Beſides, in that caſe it is enough that they teſtify their diſſent to a few; it would be quite improper to talk to every body. If that family ſhould, on the other hand, commend the walk of any preacher, this can do no harm: if he have other qualifications, he is ſo much the better for his good walk. As to the ordinary buſy bodies, tattlers, and whiſperers, that haunt the houſes where miniſters are lodged, to ſee if they can pick up any thing, a prudent family will always keep on fair generals with theſe, and never in any caſe tell them any thing good or bad.

Theſe ſeem to me to be the proper means of your direction; nor do I think you can have more.‡

I cannot bid you depend on the opinion of the clergy. Theſe of them that are moſt honeſt, though they will be ſure to tell the truth ſo far as they know, when ſeriouſly aſked, either as to a young man's preaching, piety or morals; yet, as they know it is not their province to chooſe for you, ſo they will

‡ Theſe are ſome of the external means: but this is not meant to exclude the principal means, which are the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the direction of Providence, &c. &c. And theſe are to be frequently ſought by humble and fervent ſupplication, by perſonal and family faſting, by hungering after the bread of life; and by faith on the merit and interceſſion of Chriſt.

never adviſe you to call any man, unleſs you ſee full reaſon for it yourſelves. And in general it may be remarked, that the moſt upright clergymen are moſt ſhy in giving opinions; and they that are moſt forward to give their advice are ſeldom to be depended on: Some clergymen muſt be perpetually ſcheming; but *good men* look on meddling in theſe matters as no better than Uzzah's touching the ark. It is a meddling with the deareſt right of the Chriſtian people; and with one of the pearls of Chriſt's crown. It is a common complaint in our day, among both the bodies of Seceders, that ſcheming and influence are like to be the ruin of the Seceſſion. It is ſaid, it was the driving of a ſcheme for the ſettlement of the firſt ſeceding miniſter of Glaſgow, that was the firſt riſe of the breach. That gentleman was one of the firſt four; he conceived a prejudice againſt a Rev. Father who was alſo one of the firſt four, for oppoſing his tranſportation to Glaſgow; theſe two afterwards headed the diſpute about the Burgeſs Oath; the miniſter of Glaſgow for it, and the ſaid Rev. Father againſt it. The way that the ſcheming ſpirit operates, ſo far as reſpects ſettlements, is, by ſending favourite preachers to good places, where the livings (*ſtipends*) are beſt, and keeping them there: and on the other hand, by keeping off from theſe places other preachers of ſuperior talents, for fear they ſhould cut out the favourites. The ſame is done, by employing perſons as tools in congregations in an underhand way; by puffing away in recommendations, without any reaſon, or without perſonal knowledge; by letters; by puſhing forward or keeping back moderations; and by promoting needleſs tranſportations.

Chriſtians, as your *all*, and the *all* of the *Seceſſion*, is at ſtake, when you ſee the leaſt appearance of theſe things, it behoves you to take the alarm! If ſuch things take place, the very face of religion will ſoon in a great meaſure diſappear, in ſeveral corners: for this can only, under God, be kept up by means of able, faithful, pious, and prudent miniſters.

But you will ſay, how can theſe things be? What poſſible motive can men have for acting in ſuch a manner? If ſuch be your queſtion, you know little of man or of the world. In anſwer: men have their friends, or the friends of their friends and acquaintance, to ſerve; and one good deed meets another. It coſts nothing; and if we have no friend to be ſerved in return, the favour may be repaid by ſome ſynodical favour or honour, by means of the friend whoſe friend we have ſerved. Again, there are often parties in church courts; and by introducing a friend, we ſtrengthen our party, when any cauſe comes from us to theſe courts. Yea, ſome men will ſcheme, when they have little impelling them but a mere luſt of power,—a thing ſo flattering to the PRIDE for which ſome of the *clergy* have been famed *in every age*. Often an able and an honeſt preacher has little chance—he might darken them: or perhaps he is not ſubmiſſive and pliant enough: no wonder than he be not taken by the hand. Theſe things have prevailed in the church in all ages, and they will do ſo while man is *man*. But, dear Chriſtians, you have the power in your own hand: they cannot force a preacher on you, as in the eſtabliſhed church: it is *ſolely your own fault* if your choice be not free.

But theſe are not your only dangers. Though all external influence were removed, you run an equal, yea (to tell you the plain truth) *a much greater* riſk from the ignorant, the empty, the formal, and the enthuſiaſtic profeſſors among yourſelves. Theſe in every congregation are very numerous; and in many, they outnumber the ſerious and ſolid part. To theſe it is owing, that in many places we have had reaſon to lament, for ſome time paſt, that empty preachers have ſometimes had majorities on their ſide: while valuable men have had little or no chance. Theſe ſilly people I ſpeak of can hardly ever be ſaid to *think*; but however, they *look*, and ſeem to *feel*, at leaſt *externally*. The conſequence is, that a ſolid ſermon is loſt upon them: and the impudent bawling fellow carries all before him. And, woe is me for it! this ſeems to be a common caſe, for ſome years back! But what! you will ſay, have no wiſe, able, or faithful paſtors at all been choſen by congregations in theſe bygone years! For anſwer, I do not mean to involve all, in one common charge. Proper choices have been made. But where a man of abilities a nd faithfulneſs has got in, it will *generally*, on enquiry, be found, that along with his abilities he alſo poſſeſſes ſome of theſe trifling accompliſhments which catch the multitude, but which are not eſſential to ſenſible, ſerious, and faithful preaching. And I fear his promotion has been as much owing to this as to his ſolidity. What makes me think this, is, my ſeeing a number of ſenſible and worthy men go about long without a call: and, among theſe ſome whoſe abilities, piety, prudence, and good behaviour, appear to

be equal to any, and ſuperior to the moſt: while I have ſeen with regret, on the other hand, empty, bawling, roaring fellows, whoſe morals were ſuſpicious, and whoſe diſcourſes had little to commend them but impudence and noiſe, ſuch I ſay extolled to the ſkies, and readily ſettled.

Let me now mention ſome of theſe things that catch the giddy multitude; and charm the ignorant, the empty, the formal, and the enthuſiaſtic profeſſor. They are generally caught, if a man have a deal to ſay, and have a glib tongue; if he ſpeak in a bold, forward, and forcible manner. Some think that this is owing to a great meaſure of the SPIRIT: but indeed it may be cauſed by another *ſpirit* than the ſpirit of God. Others think him uncommonly clever: but they never think what depth or ſolidity is in his diſcourſe, or what information it conveys. On this I would ſay, that where there is moſt *ſound* there is often leaſt *ſenſe*; and as in common life, ſo here, the emptieſt perſons have frequently the moſt tattle: the cauſe is the ſame in both. As to boldneſs, I own, a religious preacher has an advantage; the fear of God, and a ſenſe of the truth removes the fear of man; but this rather produces a decent freedom, than any uncommon forwardneſs. That forwardneſs ſeems generally to be rather the effect of impudence and ignorant vanity, than of the fear of God.*

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‡ The writer does not mean to vilify *ready utterance, full and diſtinct articulation, an audible* or even *tuneable voice* in ſpeaking: but only to ſhew that they are not the main things. And he knows, by long experience, how little they can do in religion. See Note page 16.

Another deceit is, the being taken with the tone of men's voices, or what is vulgarly called their *delivery*. And this is indeed the grand deceit. Though we had no evidence of the corruption of human nature, this would be a ſufficent proof of it,—that men in the worſhip of God moſtly overlook every other conſideration, and fix ſolely on the tone and manner of the preacher's voice. This is owing to the ſame cauſe, as is the attachment to images and ſenſible repreſentations of ſpiritual things among Heathens and Papiſts, and the affecting outward pomp in divine worſhip among Epiſcopals. The carnal empty mind, loſing ſight of the object, nature and end of worſhip, muſt have ſome ſenſible and outward thing in place thereof. In the preſent caſe, the idol is often one or other of the following: A pleaſant voice, a fine tone, that ſoothes your imagination, and caſts you into a ſort of devout compoſure, or even lulls you aſleep. The ſucceſs of many preachers has been much owing to this. And if you would take this out of a number of ſermons, you would take away the only part that *edified* many. But a ſlow tune on a well-played-bagpipe will have the very ſame effect; and much more the lofty ſtrains of the organ.

Again, with others, who are poſſibly of a duller diſpoſition, and need to be wakened, a loud roar is the thing. To ſome a lively forwardneſs, which they think ſpeaks earneſtneſs, and to others a ſing-ſong way, which they think ſpeaks ſerioufneſs, is moſt acceptable. But one way or other, with the ignorant, the perſonal appearance of the clergyman and the agreeable voice *do all!* Stupid fools! Do ye not

know, that theſe things are no more connected with religion, or depend on it, than the colour of men's hair, or the complexion of their faces? But they are not only uſeleſs but dangerous, when looked to: they cauſe perſons think they get good of ſermons, when they are under a groſs deluſion. To allude to the words of an apoſtle and a prophet, I may well ſay that ſuch preachings are unto you *as a ſounding braſs and tinkling cymbal*, or *as a very lovely ſong of one that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play ſkilfully on an inſtrument.*

To all the above ſome will object; would you have us to chooſe a man that cannot ſpeak, let his ſenſe be what it will? By no means: he ought not only to be able to ſpeak, but ſpeak that you can hear him, and underſtand him too: he ought to ſpeak *diſtinctly* and *decently*. But what I would wiſh is, that you be not taken with mere ſound; and that when you hear ſeveral preachers who can ſpeak diſtinctly, that you prefer the moſt ſolid. I would have you chooſe, not the one that delights your ear and no more, but the one that informs your judgment, and ſearches your conſcience. And, let me tell you, that this one will pleaſe you *longeſt* and *beſt* in the end. He will ſtill give you *new things*; and you will therefore ſeldom weary. Whereas the other will ſoon be run out; and the reliſh of his fine voice will be over: and then you will be dead as a ſtone; and religion in the corner will die in like manner.

As great deceits ariſe from looking chiefly to the outward manner of preaching, as on the above; ſo do others from a falſe view of the matter of preaching. Some are fond of *ſuperficial* and *general* preach-

ing, if it be what they call *methodical*. That is, if a ſermon have a doctrine, a number of heads, and a long train of particulars; they think ſurely this is *the very goſpel*: though at the ſame time the preacher tells us nothing but what every body knew before, and keeps a hundred miles off from our conſciences. It might be evident to every perſon of thought, that the intention of this ſort of preaching is not to inſtruct, but to amuſe; and not to gain ſouls to Chriſt, but either merely to perform the taſk and fill up the time, or elſe to gain applauſe to the preacher. Method here is all; and matter itſelf is only made ſubſervient to method. When I have heard theſe preachings, I have fancied myſelf hearing ſome ſchool-boy repeating his leſſon, a prieſt repeating the Engliſh liturgy, or a ſtory-teller ſaying over a tale. As the making of theſe preachings is moſtly the taſk of memory, it is no wonder that it be commonly ſaid that they are *good for the memory*. Though indeed they are often the particulars of ſermons ſtolen from authors by them that want to make a ſhew; while they have not penetration to dive into truth themſelves, nor ſkill and ſerioufneſs to deal with the conſcience. Such a way of preaching, however, if ſet off with a good voice, is very taking to common hearers. It does not diſturb their repoſe, except by ſome general ſentences; which as they come not home, are like blank ſhot, that does not wound. Many hink they get good, becauſe they are pleaſed in the mean time: but if they would let conſcience ſpeak, they would own, that when the ſermon is done, the good is done. That only is the GOSPEL, which

ſerves to make people *wiſer* and *better*; that ſends them anxious to their cloſets, and cuts out work for them through the week.

Again, ſome are mightily taken with what they call Caſe-Preaching. There are however ways of preaching caſes, the only uſe of which is, to make people ſleep ſound in a whole ſkin. Caſe-preaching will never do, unleſs men know to go to the bottom of things, and how to bring people out of their ill caſes. Others talk a deal of preaching *exerciſe*.‡ Tho' indeed if a man ſhould preach the exerciſe of grace, they would complain that they could not underſtand him, or that they could not get good of his ſermons. What they mean by preaching exerciſe is, to tell them that they had once on a day ſuch fears, and then ſuch joys, and that now *all is well*, and they are *out of danger*. Would to God, that ſuch preaching did not ruin many ſouls! Building up people on themſelves, and forgetting the foundation laid in Zion is rather dangerous work! But this is equally ſubverſive of holineſs and progreſſive practical obedience, as it is of the righteouſneſs of Immanuel. Theſe comforts, though they were real, (and they are oft a temporary flaſh) are not holineſs itſelf, though here put for it, but at beſt only the means of it. And the man that takes up with theſe in place of real re-

ons

‡ God forbid that I ſhould vilify a method of preaching, he when judiciouſly executed, has in all ages been ſo much bleſſed! My own practice would condemn me: But there is need of caution here as well as on other points. And we muſt not take all for gold that glitters. The goſpel is a great mystery, ſcarcely to be learned but by experience: and as there is a form of godlineſs, ſo there is a *form of knowledge*, without the power of either.

ligion, ſits down at the beginning of his journey; ſo we may eaſily gueſs where his landing will be.

In fine, if a preacher have any thing arch, clever or witty in his manner or matter, this is ſure to gain applauſe, whatever there be to follow it. What I would ſay on this is, that an humouriſt is no great character for a Divine, in the pulpit or out of it. And that ſome people would rather ſit under Paul's gravity and ſincerity, Tit. ii. 7. and expect to get more good of it, than of all the ſmart, pert, witty ſayings of the greateſt humouriſt in the world. Wit, unleſs thoroughly chaſtened, and well timed, is rather light and trifling for the pulpit; it may feed a vain fancy, and keep men from ſleeping; but it will ſeldom reach the conſcience. Wits have therefore need to lay a reſtraint on their humour, rather than give too great a looſe to it in the pulpit; if they do ſo, it may be uſeful to ſet off good matter; but if it have not ſolid matter with it, at beſt it is a mere *toy for children.*

Theſe are a few of the many things that might have been mentioned; perhaps they are the moſt eſſential. To them I would add a more general evil, that is, the exceſſive deſire to pleaſe the people of the Eſtabliſhed Church, in the choice of a Paſtor to a Seceding congregation. This at the firſt bluſh appears one of the moſt abſurd deſires that can occupy the breaſt of a Seceder. Alas! brethren, have you left theſe becauſe of their corruptions, and will you be ruled by their taſte in the main point for which you left them? Your profeſſion calls in queſtion either their judgment or conſcience; and will you prefer their judgment to your own? Is not the

preacher that is fitteſt for you alſo fitteſt for them? But ye would gather a congregation. What would you gather them to? Is it merely to a profeſſion? Why that is doing nothing; and if that be all you mean, you had much better want them; they would ſoon *eat out* any little religion that is among you. Or if you wiſh to gather them to Chriſt; a godly able miniſter is the only likely mean. The Kirk-folks are not ſo tame as you imagine; tho' they are not overdone with a fear about their ſouls, yet they are much afraid for their *purſes*: So if your Miniſter cannot reach their conſciences, though they may ſometimes hear him for a change, they will do little either for him or you. Seceſſion principles are too ſtrict to take with many of the Kirk-folks, let them be ſet off with the fineſt delivery in the nation. Theſe people may promiſe you great things; but when once Covenanting takes place among you, they may take their leave and bid you good-morow: So your chooſing a miniſter to them, and not to yourſelves, may be a chuſing one to nobody at all. And this the experience of moſt congregations verifies.

It is the error of Seceders above moſt things, and (without a ſpirit of prophecy) I can foreſee it will be the ruin of their cauſe, that they have ſuch an itch for ſetting up new congregations. New places of worſhip may ſtrengthen their intereſt, but new congregations often weaken it. Theſe congregations muſt often be weak: this leads them to lean to the Kirk-folks; and often to be lax in admiſſions to increaſe their number. Hell itſelf could not invent a more effectual mean than the laſt of theſe, (laxneſs

in admiſſions I mean) to ſap the foundations of the Seceſſion. Theſe carnal profeſſors, like a gangrene, will ſoon corrupt the body; and then the power of religion, which is the end of the Seceſſion, is gone. I ſhall not ſay what I ſee of the evidences and effects of this. To prevent this, the only poſſible method is to ceaſe from the rage for disjunctions: to hold by old and able congregations, till you be fit to ſtand by yourſelves; that no congregation be ſettled, unleſs able of themſelves to maintain a miniſter. This at leaſt ſhould be the ordinary rule. And then they will have little temptation to wrong their conſciences or ruin religion, in order to gain the favour of the Kirk-folks, and the help of their purſes; and they will get clear of one of the principal inducements that lead them aſide in calling a miniſter.

To have done; conſider that a good walk and a holy life is the principal qualification of the *Man of God*. By this he often preaches as ſucceſsfully, as by his ſermons. Other men may pleaſe a while; but theſe are likeſt to profit, as they will more commonly have God's bleſſing attending their labours. Such men, ſingle and diſintereſted, honeſt and concerned for the good of ſouls, will ſtill grow in the eſteem of their people; while your ſelfiſh, your partial, your careleſs or trifling Clergymen loſe ground daily.

You ought alſo to conſider that prudence is an eſſential qualification in a Clergyman. A man that is rude and boiſterous will ſoon rend your congregation to pieces. Or if the terror cauſed by him keep you quiet: there will be little comfort, and as little edification. A domineering imperious Clergyman is a

Pope in a Preſbyter's garb; and if the people had ſpirit to ſee their rights, there could ſcarce be ſuch a prodigy in the Seceſſion.—Unleſs Church Courts be partial, the meaneſt member of a Seceding congregation, if really aggrieved, has an eaſy method to obtain redreſs. Tyranny is one of the worſt of evils: it was it that drove us from the Eſtabliſhed Church; and it ought to have no place in the Seceſſion. On the other hand, a ſervile, complying, ſilly Clergyman will ſoon let all go into diſorder. Every perſon will tread upon him; and he will in the end be deſpiſed by profeſſor and profane. Neither of theſe characters are ſuited to the clerical office: the former will be hated, and the latter diſobeyed; the one will ruin religion by violence, and the other will bring it into contempt. But theſe are not the only points of prudence. He muſt be prudent in his walk, and prudent in the pulpit; prudent in company, and prudent in his family.

Farther, never pitch upon an ambitious or proud man: Theſe will never do for the Seceſſion. Your poverty and paucity will not allow you to gratify their abſurd empty vanity; which can be little honour to any church, poor or rich. Such a man's outward ſhew may overawe and attract the *gaping* multitude; but only ſolid ſenſe, piety, and decency will take with people of underſtanding. And with ſuch, the ridiculous ambition of theſe will be held in utter contempt.

To ſum up all: Never call any man for a few hearings. Never be over fond of a popular man: wo to him of whom *all men* (*i. e.* the giddy multitude)

ſpeak well. Never call any man for his perſonal appearance, or his delivery, or for any of theſe talents that do not reach the conſcience or tend to improve the heart. Never call a negligent man or a trifler; nor one of whoſe prudence or piety you ſtand in doubt.

But ſtudy to chooſe a man of ability and univerſal knowledge, with a diſtinct articulate voice that all can hear and underſtand; who appears to ſpeak from experience, and to be fully maſter of his ſubject; who unites the doctrinal with the practical, the information of the judgment with the improvement of the heart. Chooſe one who is grave in the pulpit, and improving in converſation; who has religion much at heart, and ſtudies to promote the power of it in the world; and whoſe walk exemplifies his ſermons. Chooſe one who is humble, not daſtardly; decent in apparel, but not gaudy; one who appears truly ſincere and ſingle, yet far from imprudence; and one who appears to be equally acquainted with men as with books. In fine, chooſe one who appears to exerciſe a ſingle dependence on God, and to be given to prayer. In ſuch alone you will have comfort; and in ſuch, unleſs it be your own fault, you will not miſs it. When once you have choſen him, aid his preachings by your prayers, and his endeavours by your own. Do not look for perfection; miniſters are men. View therefore his failings and frailties, not with the eye of a cenſorious critic, but with that of a tender friend.

Great is the ſtake,—no leſs than the being of the Seceſſion, and what is more, that of real religion,

does, in point of means, depend upon your choice. You have unſpeakable need of humility, caution and direction; the laſt you ſhould ſeek of God, by the prayer of faith. Set God before you, act ſingly, conſcientiouſly and prudently, and leave events to Him who alone has them in his diſpoſal.‡

Beware of lax and carnal profeſſors: beware alſo of enthuſiaſts. Though they are almoſt ever wrong in their choice, yet they are the moſt confident of all; and they ſometimes think they have a revelation from God to warrant their erroneous opinion.

I am, Chriſtians,

Your Sincere Friend,

THE AUTHOR.

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‡ In this Letter, perhaps too much ſtreſs may ſeem to be laid on the qualifications of Miniſters; and indeed there is a danger there. They are inſtruments, but the ſucceſs depends upon the will and pleaſure of the Great God. Perhaps alſo, too little mention is made of the ſpiritual exerciſes of faith, prayer, earneſt wreſtling with God, ſecret and family faſting often repeated, neceſſary in view of calling a Miniſter. Theſe things are our duty. But the deſign of this letter was to rebuke a number of viſible abuſes and this cauſed me to dwell moſt upon them.

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